

Remarks at a Luncheon for Representative Heather Wilson in Albuquerque
April 29, 2002

The President. Gosh, thanks for that warm welcome. It's great to be back in New Mexico. I'm glad to know my Texas passport is still active. [Laughter]

I'm here because it is very important for the people of New Mexico to send Heather Wilson back to the United States Congress. I'm here to give my whole-hearted support to her candidacy.

Before I spend a little time fleshing that out, I want to say something about the senior Senator from New Mexico. There's no finer American in the United States Senate than Pete Domenici. I'm proud to call him friend, and I'm proud to get lectured by him all the time. [Laughter] It seems like he's always got important issues on his mind, the labs, mental health parity. But he is a great ally and a really fine Senator.

I'm also honored to have served with—been the President at the same time that Joe Skeen was the United States Congressman from another congressional district here in New Mexico. We're going to miss old Joe, but I'm confident he still has my address and willing to give—

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. That's good. But thank you for your service.

I want to thank John Dendahl, the party chairman of the Republican Party of New Mexico, and all the party leaders who are here. I particularly want to say something about the grassroots, the people who work the phone banks and lick the envelopes and do all the work necessary to keep people like me and Pete and Heather in office. And I want to thank you for your loyalty; I want to thank you for your passion for our political party; and I want to thank you for the endless hours you put on our behalf.

I want to thank the Lieutenant Governor and all the State officials who are here.

And I want to thank you all for supporting Heather. Here's the way I feel: Anytime you find somebody who brings such class and dignity to a political office, we as Americans owe our support to her. And Heather Wilson brings a lot of class and a lot of dignity.

You know, in Washington there's a lot of—there can be a lot of noise, a lot of shrill voices, people who are—people up there sometimes are the ones who like to divide people into camps and call names and point fingers. They think that's effective, and it's such a wonderful contrast to have the quiet dignity and the competence of Heather Wilson in the United States Congress. It is so good and refreshing and good for our democracy and good for our country that people like Heather are willing to serve. She can get things done for New Mexico.

The thing I appreciate, Heather, is she is there for the right reason, to serve the people, to represent the people of New Mexico. And I'm proud of our political party, make no mistake about it, but I'm proud of the fact that Heather puts our country first, that she understands the importance of our Nation and what it stands for.

I remember so well going to Griegos Elementary with Heather. She said, "You come to my district. I want you to go, first and foremost, to an elementary school." Because she understands that when we educate our children, the American Dream will be extended to every neighborhood. I appreciate that spirit.

She told me that the day I signed the no-child-left-behind legislation, which was a significant piece of educational reform, supported both by Heather and by Pete, that she went back to Griegos. And it was a fitting place for her to go, because this is a piece of legislation which says that

America will refuse to condemn any child to failure. It is a piece of public—legislation that says to our public schools, we'll set high standards for every child—I mean every child—that we trust the local people to chart the path to excellence, and that we refuse to accept a system that simply shuffles children through. And the beneficiaries of this type of mentality are going to be the children who go to Griegos, and Heather knows that. And I want to thank you for your strong support on education reform. It means so much to this part of the world, to all our country that we got this legislation done.

I also appreciate so very much Heather's values. You know, we were coming in; I said—I'm trying to get her to talk about issues; she wants to talk about Little League baseball. [*Laughter*] Here I am, trying to tell her what's going on in the world, which we eventually got to, but the first thing on her mind was to let me know that her son and Jay's son is a Little League player and how proud of the fact that she was that the lad suits up, gives it his all, occasionally gets a base hit. Must be Jay's genes. [*Laughter*] But she loves her family. She loves her husband. And I think that's also an important trait for anybody to serve our public well.

And Jay, I want to thank you for your patience and understanding and support for this fine lady who serves New Mexico in the United States Congress.

I also want to thank Heather for her strong support for Kirtland Air Force Base. People got to—I think it's important, when people start heading in these voting booths next fall, that—particularly in this part of the world—that they understand Heather's influence, that she's making a difference, that she's getting things done for this part of the world. And one of the things that she's good at is understanding the importance for national defense. Kirtland Air Force Base is an incredible part of that national defense of the United States.

I remember so well campaigning here in New Mexico and then coming back to the Barelás Job Opportunity Center, which she and Pete helped get started. Pete and Heather were telling me that there's been 6,000 people that have been helped in this job center, people to be able to find work. And I want to thank you all for inviting me back for—when we opened up that facility, and I want to thank you for leading on that.

But jobs is an incredibly important part of Heather's agenda, and it's an incredibly important part of mine. And it—here's the way I feel about it: If anybody's looking for work and can't find work, we've got a job problem. And I know the numbers are beginning to look better, but you know, I leave the numbers for the statisticians and the bean counters. We're practical people that's—got to keep asking the question, how do we keep America employed, and how do we keep the job base growing?

And one other thing Heather understands is the role of Government is not to create wealth but to create an environment in which small businesses can grow and the entrepreneurs of America can flourish. And we campaigned on the idea that if you let people have more of their own money—I emphasize "their own money"—that there would be more money to spend, more demand for goods and services. And with more demand for goods and services, somebody will produce the goods and services. And when they produce the goods and services, it means somebody is going to find work.

This tax cut that I campaigned on and fought for, that Pete and Heather and Joe supported, was the right thing for America at this point in our history. And it has made a big difference in helping people find work.

Heather also understands the need to have fairness when it comes to Medicare. And she is going to take a leadership role in helping to provide prescription drug coverage within the Medicare system, so our

seniors do not go without. It's an important initiative, and thank goodness she's willing to lend her talent to get this job done. She's close to the Speaker on this issue, and when you're close to the Speaker on this issue, you have a good chance to make a significant difference for the elderly of not only New Mexico and the United States of America.

There's a lot more issues that we could talk about where Heather has taken a leadership role, but I do want to talk about one more, and that is energy. Our Nation has not had an energy policy. And I came along with the Vice President, and I tasked him to develop an energy policy, one that recognizes that technology is going to help us conserve better. And we need to conserve more. We need to be wiser about how we use our energy. And part of our vision and part of our plan and part of our initiative is to make sure that we're able to get power to the consumer across a modern infrastructure, as opposed to one that is now aging and decrepit.

But we also recognize that it is important for us to find more energy in America, that we ought to produce more. We have a national security problem. Over 50 percent of our energy comes from other countries, and some of those countries don't like us. Some of them aren't our friends. And so for the sake of our national security and for the sake of our economic security, we need an energy bill. One passed the House, and I want to thank Heather for her leadership. One has passed the Senate, and I appreciate Pete for his leadership. And now it's time for Congress to act and get a bill to my desk which I can sign.

I mentioned national security, and that's on my mind these days. Every morning when I'm there in Washington, I walk into the beautiful Oval Office and read a threat assessment prepared by our intelligence agencies, and it's in a list of what we're learning and what we think and what we know about an enemy that still wants to hit America. So every day I'm reminded

that my biggest task and most important job is to protect the homeland.

And we're making progress. We're still a vulnerable nation, and the reason we're vulnerable is because we've got an enemy that hates us, an enemy that is nothing but coldblooded killers. That's all they are, as far as I'm concerned. We're doing a much better job of sharing information—of gathering information and sharing it. To put it in Midland, Texas, terms: Anytime we get a hint, we're following up on it. Every time we get a sense that something may be about to happen or somebody is trying to attack a U.S. citizen or facility, you just need to know we're responding. Our number one priority of our law enforcement agencies around America is to run down every lead, every hint.

We've also got a strategy here at home to deal with bioterrorism. And that's a real threat to America, but we must be prepared if such a threat were to come. We've got an initiative to make sure that our borders are more secure. We've got to do a better job at the INS of understanding who is coming into our country, why they're coming into our country, and how long they intend to stay in our country. And if they're going to be here for a short period of time, are they actually leaving our country? For the sake of our national security, we've got to reform the INS and bring it up to speed and make it a modern agency with the capacity to gather and disperse information in a modern way.

But the best way to secure the homeland for America is to run these killers down one by one and bring them to justice. And it's not going to be easy, nor is it going to happen as quickly as some might like. I do not have a calendar on my desk that says, "At such-and-such a time, you will stop. You, President Bush, on such-and-such a date will have run out the string, and it's time for you to quit." That calendar doesn't exist, because my mind-frame is

this: When it comes to defending our freedoms, no matter how long it takes, that's exactly what this country is going to do.

We're not going to forget what happened on September the 11th. We've learned more about the enemy. We learned a good lesson, that two oceans can no longer protect us, that because we're an open society, we're a vulnerable society. But we're not going to allow our openness and our love for freedom to go away. I mean, one of the things the enemy wants to do is to say, "You know, since you love freedom, you're under attack." And I guess the corollary is, is that, "Get rid of your freedoms." But that's not the way we think in America. When it comes to defense of our country, when it comes to our defense and defending our values, we're plenty tough. And that's the way it's going to be, much to the chagrin of the killers.

I have unleashed the United States military, and they have not let us down. For those of you who have got relatives in the military, a son or a daughter or a husband or a wife, I want to thank you, on behalf of a grateful nation, for their sacrifice and your understanding.

I have submitted a budget to the United States Congress which makes a priority of our national defense. And I expect that—the appropriations process to pass the defense bill first. In times of war, I ought to have the defense appropriations bill on my desk as soon as possible. We don't need any people playing politics with the defense of the United States of America.

You know, when I was campaigning in Chicago one time, they said, "Would you ever have a deficit?" I said, "I hope not." I said, "I think it's important for us to make—to work hard to have a balanced budget." But I said, "Yes, I'd have a deficit if I were the President only if we were at war or in a recession or in times of emergency." I didn't think I was going to draw the trifecta. *[Laughter]*

But when it comes time to defending our freedom, we need to understand, even

though the price of freedom is high, it is not too high. It is never too high. And that's what the Congress has got to say, and that's what the Congress has got to know.

The other thing that's important for us is to uphold the doctrines that I lay out, or the country lays out. And when we said, "If you harbor a terrorist, you're just as bad as a terrorist," I meant it, and the Taliban found out exactly what we meant.

Now, one of the things that's important for our fellow citizens to understand is that we're not seeking revenge; we're seeking justice. And when we went into Afghanistan, we went in not as conquerors—we weren't interested in conquering anybody—we went in as liberators. And I'm so proud of the fact that not only is this Nation tough and strong but that we care deeply about young girls who had never been to school in their lives, and we're proud to have freed the people of Afghanistan from the clutches of one of the most barbaric regimes in the history of mankind.

We've got a lot of work to do there. And so you just need to know that our military is going to be there for awhile. I mean, they've got these little pockets of these killers showing up, and we're just going to have to find them, keep chasing them down. We've got work to help this country rebuild her military, so that she can defend herself. We've got work about—to make sure that the humanitarian aid and assistance that we're so generously providing is effective. So we'll be there for awhile. We'll be there for awhile.

And another reason why we're going to be there is because the second phase of this war—our strategy has been to deny sanctuary to any of the killers in anywhere else, in any other country. So when we find a country that looks like a safe haven for them, a place where they may try to bunch up and train or set up a logistical command center, we're shutting them down. We've got a great coalition, thanks

to our Secretary of State and my administration. We're nurturing that coalition. We're reminding them that to be a member of this coalition, you've got to perform. We don't need any sweet talk; what we want is results. And so we're denying sanctuary to Al Qaida killers and terrorist killers. And so therefore, if they have no sanctuary, it's more likely they'll remain in Afghanistan, which is fine with us, because that's where we're prepared to chase them down.

I wish I could tell you that—what the timetable is going to be. I can't. But the good news is, the American people don't expect a timetable. They're unified, and for that I'm grateful. We are strong, and for that I'm grateful. We're a disciplined nation when it comes to our defense, and for that I'm incredibly grateful as well.

You know, this war on terror is bigger than just an organization. It's certainly bigger than one person. We've also got to deal with—and we will—and confront—and we will—the fact that nations—there are nations in this world who hate America who are developing and have developed weapons of mass destruction. And a nightmare scenario for future generations of freedom-loving people is to allow one of these nations to team up with a terrorist organization so that they could blackmail America and our friends and hold us hostage. And you just need to know, I'm just not going to let that happen.

History has called us to action. History has given this chance—this nation a chance to lead. And that's exactly what we're going to do, so long as I'm the President of the United States.

I'm pleased with the support I'm getting in Congress. I want to thank Pete and Heather and Joe for their strong support for the national defense of the United States. I am going to make sure that as the budget process goes on, that I will defend the priorities that I have submitted to Congress, primarily our national defense and homeland security, and make a clear

case to Congress not to overspend, to show some fiscal discipline and some restraint, that we've got plenty of money to fund our priorities. We've just got to make sure we stay focused on the priorities.

I also want you to know that there are a way for every one of us to help join in this war against terror to fight evil. And the way I like to put it is, go love a neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself; that if you want to fight evil, do some good; that if you want to show the killers that we're not going to be intimidated, feed the homeless, mentor a child, start a program, a faith-based program in your church or synagogue or mosque, all aimed at showing somebody who may have fallen to the depths of despair that somebody loves them, that there is a good and gracious God that loves them. And you can be a messenger, on behalf of the good and gracious God, to help somebody in need.

And that's what's happening around America. This is a unique moment, because the character of our country is shining through. I mean, we're tough, but we're compassionate. We're strong, but we want to help the weak. And by doing so, the country is an amazing place for people who are fortunate enough to become an American. When people see our true character, they're amazed that we're a welcoming society. It doesn't matter how you were born or where you're raised; it doesn't matter if your mother or dad speaks Spanish and not English, because you're welcome in America. This country is available for you and your children.

We need to show the world that when they hit us, they not only awakened our military and our strength and our resolve; they also awakened a deep and abiding compassion in our fellow human beings, who may not be as fortunate as we are.

I want to thank you all, if you're doing that. If you're not, I call you to do it. I ask you, on behalf of the country, to redouble your efforts or to begin your efforts to help somebody who might hurt,

to love somebody who needs love. And in so doing, you help strengthen America. You help us defeat an enemy that tried to change our country.

It is such an honor to be the President of the greatest nation on the face of the Earth. I'm honored you came today, and I want to thank you for supporting a really fine soul, in Heather Wilson.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:44 a.m. in the Pyramid Ballroom at the Crowne Plaza Pyramid Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gov. Walter Bradley of New Mexico; and Representative Wilson's husband, Jay Hone and their son, Joshua Hone. Representative Wilson is a candidate for reelection in New Mexico's First Congressional District.

Remarks Following a Discussion With Community Leaders in South Central Los Angeles, California April 29, 2002

The President: Well, thank you all very much, my fellow Americans. I'm honored to be here. I want to thank you, John, very much for your leadership and your vision. It's nice to see your mother here. My mother is still telling me what to do, too. [Laughter] I'm sure you're listening. [Laughter] So am I.

I want to thank you all for giving me a chance to come and just share some thoughts with you about what's on my mind. I want to thank Reverend Murray. I want to thank him for riding back from the airport with me and sharing his thoughts and his vision and his hope.

I want to thank John Mack. John's reputation had preceded him and managed to even make it to the State of Texas. [Laughter] He's a great leader of the Urban League, and I want to thank him for his visionary and steadfast leadership. As John told me, that in the aftermath of the civil unrest, this part of the world began to rebuild, became a more hopeful place, and John quickly pointed out, partly because of the leadership of the two men I just named. And I want to thank them for being such solid citizens in a community that needed leadership.

I want to thank, as well, Charles Kim and Antonia Hernandez for inviting me and helping set up what has been a very inter-

esting and important discussion for me. You see, the President is—can still learn. And I try to learn and absorb what's best about America, so I can share it with other Americans. And the spirit of the discussion we had was important for me to see and hear. I wish all of America could have heard how optimistic and hopeful people were.

These are folks from the religious community, community-based community, the business leaders. We had bankers. We've got some entrepreneurs that are—and I know a little something about entrepreneur—the entrepreneurial spirit, and these were the entrepreneurs' entrepreneur. [Laughter] I want to thank them for telling me their stories.

You know, I firmly believe God is on the side of justice and reconciliation. But as Martin Luther King said, "God isn't going to do it all by Himself." And I was with—I like to put it this way, that these good folks are soldiers in the armies of compassion. We had some generals; we had some sergeants; we had some privates; but all of them a part of this army; all of them anxious to make the American experience extend throughout all neighborhoods. And I feel the same way.

I fully understand that 10 years ago this city, because of some violence—a lot of violence—saw incredible destruction in